

## PETITIONS COMMITTEE

ABERDEEN, 22 September 2015. Minute of Meeting of the PETITIONS COMMITTEE. Present:- Councillor Donnelly, Convener; Councillor Carle, Vice-Convener; Councillor George Adam, the Lord Provost and Councillors Cameron (as substitute for Councillor Cormie), Graham, Jaffrey, MacGregor, Malik, Malone (as substitute for Councillor Delaney), Jean Morrison MBE (as substitute for Councillor Nathan Morrison), Reynolds, Stuart and Townson (as substitute for Councillor Dickson).

**The agenda and reports associated with this minute can be located at the following link:-**

**<http://committees.aberdeencity.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=484&MIId=3640&Ver=4>**

**Please note that if any changes are made to this minute at the point of approval, these will be outlined in the subsequent minute and this document will not be retrospectively altered.**

### **CROSSING REFUGE - NORTH DEESIDE ROAD, CULTS**

1. The Committee had before it the following petition which had been submitted by Ms Margaret Forbes:-

“Crossing Refuge – North Deeside Road, Cults”

“We the undersigned petition the Council to install a crossing refuge near the junction of Abbotshall Road and Westerton Road:-

As local residents are having difficulty crossing from the bus stop near the above junction, we request that consideration be given to providing a crossing refuge. The volume of traffic at significant times of the day is high and the junction causes extra congestion making it difficult to judge how to cross safely. The elderly, the young and parents with buggies and toddlers are all bus users, and the problem is growing as traffic through Cults increases.”

The Convener explained the process and invited the lead petitioner to present her case to the Committee.

Ms Margaret Forbes, the lead petitioner, spoke to the petition and advised that North Deeside Road was a busy route with a high volume of traffic during mornings and late afternoon when children were travelling to and from school. She explained that crossing from the South side of North Deeside Road was particularly busy due to traffic travelling west and three sources of traffic travelling from the East. She also highlighted that major road works to the North and West of Cults had increased the number of commuters from the Bridge of Dee who used Abbotshall Road and that the staggered junction at Abbotshall Road and Westerton Road; and a busy nearby bus stop had increased the level of traffic.

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Mike Cheyne, Roads Infrastructure Manager and Vycki Ritson, Roads Infrastructure Team Leader appended a briefing note and advised that the provision of a pedestrian crossing point at this location had been raised previously with the Traffic Management and Road Safety Team and they had assessed this crossing point using the standard PV<sup>2</sup> Assessment and found that the volume of vehicles and pedestrians was insufficient to justify the installation of a traffic management system. Further to this, officers outlined that widening the road would require land purchases and would have cost implications; and that the installation of a pedestrian island on the existing road geometry would be a safety concern.

### **The Committee resolved:-**

- (i) to request officers to report on the terms of the petition, as well as all traffic management options at the location on North Deeside Road, Aberdeen to a future meeting of the Communities, Housing and Infrastructure Committee; and
- (ii) to thank the petitioner for her presentation.

## **CLEAN UP ABERDEEN HARBOUR BEACH AND COASTAL PATH**

**2.** The Committee had before it the following petition which had been submitted by Ms Apithanny Bourne:-

“We the undersigned petition the council to perform a clean up and necessary maintenance of the Harbour Beach below Torry Battery, where littering and fly tipping has reached an unacceptable level”.

“Something must be done regarding the amount of litter at the harbour beach/coastal path below Torry Battery. Not only can litter be found on the beach itself, but large amounts of household waste appear to be dumped down the side of the cliff from the road above.

Many people regularly enjoy visiting this beautiful area of the city to watch the local wildlife. At weekends the beach is always busy with photographers, dog walkers, young people and families. Considering the numerous health benefits of spending time outdoors, this area is an invaluable asset to the local community.

Excessive litter is not just an eyesore but dangerous to the people and pets who enjoy this beach. Litter poses a significant threat to the environment and marine wildlife, particularly seabirds. It's also unacceptable that children should have to play and rock-pool amongst empty beer cans and other waste.

Few cities can boast such an excellent dolphin watching spot so close to its centre – something Aberdeen City Council is seriously undervaluing. Aberdeen

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has huge potential to attract wildlife tourism; if only it's natural spaces were given the attention and protection from vandalism that they deserve.

I propose the following measures to be undertaken:

- An initial intensive clean up of litter by council staff AND invitation to the general public to help. People putting in hard work will be less likely to litter or to tolerate others doing so;
- Following this, regular litter collecting by the council to avoid the beach getting in such a bad state again;
- Improved waste collection services in the local area if this is the root cause of the fly tipping;
- Additional bins on the beach itself and not just in the car park;
- Signage prohibiting fly tipping and explaining it to be a chargeable offence;
- Improved signage showcasing the fantastic wildlife which can be seen in the area;
- Closing up of the stone shelter opposite the car park which encourages antisocial behaviour;
- Education of local school children in Torry as to the effects of littering on marine wildlife, drawing special attention to their local harbour beach; and
- General maintenance/levelling of the paths leading down to the beach and around the base of the cliff. This will make it safer and more accessible to all."

The Convener explained the process and invited the lead petitioner to present her case to the Committee.

Ms Apithanny Bourne spoke to the petition by way of presentation and advised that Harbour Beach was a valuable asset for promoting physical and mental wellbeing and was a popular destination for a variety of activities and was also the location of RSPB's Dolphin Watch. Ms Bourne highlighted the lack of bins on the beach and raised her concern about the build up of litter and household waste which was unsightly, unhygienic and could damage the marine environment. Further to this, she suggested a number of improvements that could be introduced to tackle the root causes of littering and highlighted the importance of educating young people and raising awareness amongst the general population on what actions needed to be undertaken to increase the cleanliness of Harbour Beach and its surrounding area.

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Steven Shaw, Environmental Manager explained that addressing the littering problem on the Coastal Walk was a constant issue and highlighted his concern about the level of anti-social behaviour and drinking on the beach. Mr Shaw explained that he had met with various partners including the City Rangers and Torry Community Council to promote the location and maintain its cleanliness; and highlighted that the Council was a partner with RSPB's Dolphin Watch.

Mr Shaw advised that resources were spread thin due to the scale of the littering along the Coastal Walk but informed members that there were plans to introduce more strategically placed bins and they were investigating the possibility of installing Bigbelly bins which could hold more litter and were bird proof; but they would have to consider the health and safety implications for Council staff who would be responsible for retrieving and emptying the bins a significant distance from the beach.

### **The Committee resolved:-**

- (i) to note the petition;
- (ii) to instruct officers to investigate the greater use of unpaid work teams through Community Service Orders to help the local community to clean and maintain Aberdeen Harbour Beach;
- (iii) to instruct officers to liaise with the City Wardens with regards to reducing anti-social behaviour and with the Ranger Service to co-ordinate the maintenance of cleanliness on Aberdeen Harbour Beach;
- (iv) to request that officers arrange a meeting with the petitioner to discuss further options for cleaning and maintaining Aberdeen Harbour Beach;
- (v) to agree to take no action otherwise on the petition; and
- (vi) to thank the petitioner for an excellent and informative presentation.

## **MARISCHAL SQUARE INVESTMENT**

**3.** The Committee had before it the following petition which had been submitted by Mr William Skidmore:-

"We the undersigned petition the council to The public wants to know the details of the investment decision process that Aberdeen City Council followed from the initial idea to vacate St. Nicholas House through to the award of contract to Muse/Aviva for the Marischal Square development that ultimately led to the council's decision to deliver guaranteed annual lease payments to Aviva over 35 years for a hotel, retail and office space at Marischal Square. The Information to be provided should include, but not be limited to, the following: • The key stages of the investment decision process. • The qualifications, skills and experience of those tasked with managing and executing the process. • The documentation produced to support the decision. • The stakeholder engagement programme. • Effectiveness and relevance of each and every consultation process. • The

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advice given to the council regarding State Aid implications. • The steps taken to alienate the Common Good Land”.

“The Council should present the information at a formal meeting hosted by the Convener of the Finance, Policy and Resources Committee. Sufficient time should be set aside for questions and answers at the end of the presentation. Representatives from the following organisations and interested parties should be invited to attend:

City Centre Community Council;  
Common Weal Aberdeen;  
Reject Marischal Square Development campaign group;  
Stop the Desecration of Marischal Square campaign group;  
Any other campaign groups who opposed the Marischal Square development;  
and  
The local press.”

The Convener explained the process and invited the lead petitioner to present his case to the Committee.

Mr William Skidmore and Dr Lorna McHattie spoke to the petition by way of presentation and explained that the purpose of the petition was to increase the level of public engagement with regards to the Marischal Square investment process. The petitioners advised the Committee that they wanted to better understand the decision making process and the Council’s assessment of risk and what constituted best value to the tax payer. The petitioners advised that they sought a high level meeting with key decision makers to address their concerns and provided a list of groups that should be invited and a list of indicative questions that would be presented to the said meeting.

Stephen Booth, Property Estates Manager and Steven Whyte, Head of Finance explained that the decision making process began in 2003 when St Nicholas House was deemed to be not fit for purpose and they summarised the number of reports submitted to Council and its Committees; and highlighted the number of consultations and public engagement events undertaken in that time. Further to this, they advised that the Council had followed the correct procedures and processes and whenever possible had released information to the public but explained that this was not always possible due to third party involvement as the Council did not exclusively own the intellectual property rights, and a number of reports could not be released as they were commercially sensitive. The officers advised that market conditions would have a relative impact on the level of risk and explained that all capital investment projects carried a degree of risk but disputed the assertion that the Council had undertaken a full risk option as there were elements in place that mitigated the level of risk.

### **The Committee resolved:-**

- (i) to note that this decision process began in June 2003;

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- (ii) to instruct officers to identify all relevant reports since that time and to issue all public ones to the petitioner, and to review those reports previously exempt to determine the extent to which they can be released and issue them accordingly;
- (iii) to instruct officers to respond to the remaining requests for information as a Freedom of Information request;
- (iv) to agree to take no action otherwise on the petition; and
- (v) to thank the petitioners for their presentation.

### **MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING OF 21 APRIL 2015**

4. The Committee had before it the minute of its previous meeting of 21 April 2015.

**The Committee resolved:-**

to approve the minute as a correct record.

- **COUNCILLOR ALAN DONNELLY, Convener.**